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INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6860
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RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8089
RUEHB/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5339
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2574
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2726
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3509
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4670
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5205
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9802
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001661

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PRM/ECA FOR NIRIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2017

TAGS: PREF PHUM PREL BL CU

SUBJECT: CUBAN DOCTOR PREVENTED FROM DEPARTING BOLIVIA

REF: LA PAZ 591

Classified By: Ecopol Chief Andrew Erickson
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (SBU) On June 14, Cuban doctor Ruber Rodriguez Cruz was detained by Bolivian immigration authorities in Santa Cruz after boarding an American Airlines flight bound for Miami. Dr. Rodriguez Cruz eventually managed to leave the airport and found a "safe place" to avoid Bolivian authorities. We are actively following this case and the GOB is aware of the USG's interest. We will intervene tactfully with the GOB should it move to bring Dr. Rodriguez Cruz under the control or physical custody of Cuban officials. This is the first incident, that we are aware of, in which a Cuban doctor has been prevented from traveling to the United States. However, following the December 2006 Dr. Amauris Samartino case (reftel), it appears that Cubans with ties to Samartino such as Rodriguez Cruz have perhaps been put on Bolivia's "red-list" (do not fly list). End Summary.

The Facts as We Know Them

¶12. (SBU) The Embassy La Paz consular section first learned of the doctor's detention from a phone call received at approximately 10:00 AM local time from Santa Cruz immigration supervisor Esther Crespo. Dr. Rodriguez Cruz was traveling to the United States on a transportation letter issued by the Embassy La Paz Consular Section. He was initially stopped and sent to secondary for not having a valid passport, which has not happened in any previous cases of Cuban doctors departing Bolivia seeking refuge in the United States. (Note: The Cuban Embassy takes the passports of all doctors working in Bolivia. End Note). Once in secondary, immigration authorities required Dr. Rodriguez Cruz to pay a

fine of USD \$1.25 for every day he was in country beyond his initial 30 days, since he could not demonstrate he had an extension of stay. He claims he paid USD \$622 to the immigration shift supervisor and was not given a receipt. He states he was afraid to ask for a receipt.

¶3. (C) Following payment of the "fine", Dr. Rodriguez Cruz was permitted to board the American Airlines plane. Shortly thereafter, he was called by a crew member to report to immigration again. He was escorted from the plane by an American Airlines security agent. Crespo told the American Airlines security agent that the doctor would not be permitted to fly, because immigration could not make contact with the person who signed the doctor's transportation letter. According to the American Airlines security agent, the doctor was left unguarded in the pre-embarkation lounge while the immigration authorities attempted to contact the consular section. Meanwhile Dr. Rodriguez Cruz's luggage was removed from the plane and the American Airlines security agent returned it to him. The doctor then simply walked out of the airport and went to a "safe place." According to Dr. Rodriguez Cruz he has no valid identification with him, but plans to escape to a neighboring country, Brazil, Peru or Paraguay.

Embassy La Paz Response

¶4. (SBU) As noted above, the acting consular chief has been following the case closely and has been in contact with Dr. Rodriguez Cruz, immigration authorities, various staff members of American Airlines and Interior Vice Minister Ruben Gamara. The GOB is aware of the USG's interest. We will intervene tactfully with the GOB should it move to bring Dr. Rodriguez Cruz under the control or physical custody of Cuban officials. Embassy La Paz has quietly reminded the GOB that returning Dr. Rodriguez Cruz to Cuba (refoulement) would be considered unacceptable and a violation of the Geneva Convention. UNHCR has been apprised of the situation, but we have asked that they hold off on acting until it is clear what the GOB's intentions are regarding Dr. Rodriguez Cruz.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) This is the first case of a Cuban doctor being detained upon departure. At least ten have successfully traveled to the United States under the Significant Public Benefit Protocol (SPBP). It is not clear at this time if the GOB has adopted a policy of blocking Cuban doctors from traveling to the United States. However, following the December 2006 Dr. Amauris Samartino case (reftel), it appears that Cubans with ties to Samartino such as Rodriguez Cruz have perhaps been put on Bolivia's "red-list" (do not fly list). (Note: In the Samartino case, the doctor was detained while in Bolivia for participating in anti-GOB activities, but Samartino had not tried to leave the country. End Note). Embassy La Paz will continue to watch this case and the GOB's general disposition toward Cuban doctors closely. End Comment.

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